

Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative: South Dakota Highway Patrol



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INTRODUCTION

The South Dakota Highway Patrol (SDHP) is one of 15 sites selected to participate in the Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative (SNPPI). SNPPI provides policy review, assessments, training, and technical assistance to a cohort of law enforcement agencies across the nation. The four goals of the initiative are to identify promising strategies that reduce crime, protect officer's safety and wellness, enable productive interagency partnerships with law enforcement and community stakeholders, and implement innovative and effective technologies to help police departments safeguard neighborhoods.

METHODOLOGY

Each of the 15 selected departments has an assigned CNA Strategic Site Team, a Coordinator (SSC), and an operations analyst to assist with planning, implementation, coordination, and delivery of technical assistance. The CNA team worked with the SDHP senior staff to capitalize on the agency's great work already in progress across the four policing principles. To do this, CNA reviewed SDHP's strategic plan, along with operational and support practices, and identified technical assistance that matched SDHP's priorities. The CNA team then helped apply additional tools and resources to those priorities. The resulting initiatives demonstrate how the SDHP achieves positive change related to the principles of precision policing. These initiatives were documented and will be available to police departments nationwide to implement precision policing practices that promote public safety.

AGENCY BACKGROUND

The SDHP has recognized that success in modern American policing requires two overarching components: (1) maintaining a commitment to the values and traditions that have led to agency success over time; and (2) building the capacity for the agency to adjust to, and eventually to anticipate, the changes needed to sustain success in a rapidly changing environment.

The SDHP is the only statewide law enforcement agency participating in the SNPPI and, therefore, provides a perspective on the challenges and opportunities that may be unique to state agencies. This report focuses on the ways the SDHP is addressing that reality and its successes and lessons learned along the way.

The SDHP was established in 1935 to enhance highway safety and to provide assistance to motorists. The SDHP, a component of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety, is headquartered in the capital city of Pierre, South Dakota. The agency currently employs 189 troopers and 77 civilians. Colonel Craig Price is the 14th superintendent of the SDHP and has held that position since 2011. Although the SNPPI Site Team collaborated with a number of SDHP personnel during this project, Colonel Price was the team's primary point of contact.

South Dakota has more than 1,800 certified state and local law enforcement officers. There are 66 county sheriff's offices, many of which are very small (with fewer than five deputies). The SDHP routinely provides assistance to local agencies and recognizes the importance of this statewide responsibility. This law enforcement structure enhances the role and influence of the statewide SDHP in many small communities. Together, the two largest cities, Sioux Falls and Rapid City, are home to more than 200,000 residents.¹ Police services in these two communities and many others across the state are provided by local departments.

“ During a SNPPI Team site visit, one trooper reported driving more than 100 miles to back-up a fellow officer on a call. Traveling such distances to provide assistance to another officer is not uncommon in South Dakota. Geography and distance affect many important elements of agency management and operations, including supervision, officer safety, scheduling, and training, and is what distinguishes many state agencies from municipal police departments.

The SDHP is responsible for enforcing all criminal and traffic laws in South Dakota. Highway safety and enforcement are priorities for the agency across 77,000 square miles and a population of 830,000 people who are connected by a state highway system of almost 8,000 miles.² This means that there is one SDHP officer for every 407 square miles and a ratio of 0.2 officer per 1,000 residents, compared with the national average of 2.4 officers per 1,000 people.³ State troopers are stationed in all corners of the state. In many small duty stations, the trooper may be the only SDHP employee living in the community.

On average, SDHP state troopers respond to about 150,000 calls for service each year. In 2016, troopers investigated more than 3,600 motor vehicle crashes, made 2,392 DUI arrests, and made

2 South Dakota Department of Transportation Website, January 2018.

3 FBI Uniform Crime Reporting, "Crime in the United States, 2011." <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/police-employee-data>.

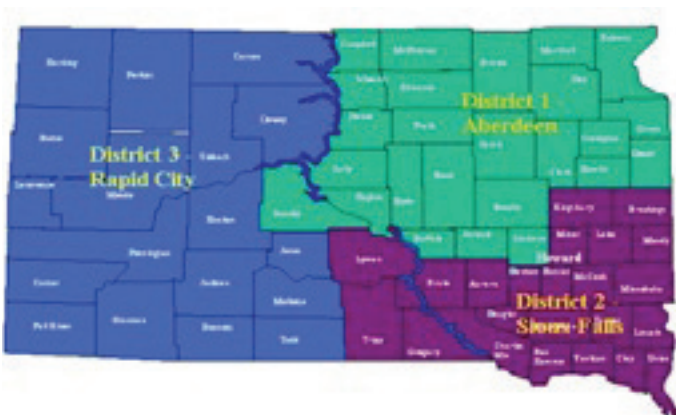
1 Information received from SDHP staff, January 2018.



Statewide photo of SDHP employees and Governor Dennis Daugaard on the front steps of the State Capitol

4,230 illegal narcotics arrests.⁴ Although SDHP troopers account for only 10 percent of the total number of certified officers in South Dakota, they investigate approximately 21 percent of all motor vehicle crashes and approximately 80 percent of the fatal motor vehicle crashes that occur in South Dakota.⁵

The SDHP community and stakeholders include local, other state and federal law enforcement agencies, residents of and visitors to South Dakota, Native American tribes, crime victims, the South Dakota Department of Transportation, and state, local, and federal prosecutors.



The above photo is a geographic breakdown of the 3 SDHP patrol districts.

The SDHP does not have a designated criminal investigative unit, but SDHP troopers will conduct criminal investigations when the troopers are the sole responders to general service calls and felonies in progress. Troopers routinely partner with the state's Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) and members of other agencies in South Dakota to investigate vehicular homicides, drug cases, officer-involved shootings, and other complex criminal cases.⁶

The SDHP takes seriously its responsibility as the most visible police agency across South Dakota and understands the unique role that it, and all state police/ highway patrol organizations, play. SDHP is aggressively seeking new ways to improve public safety service. Colonel Price and his staff support and promote the principles of precision policing.

4 SDHP statistics for calendar year 2016, January 2018.
 5 Ibid.
 6 CNA Site Team, interviews with South Dakota Highway Patrol staff, September 6–8, 2016.

The SDHP is a proud organization that relies heavily on its strong traditions of service and core values to guide the actions of its leadership and employees. Troopers routinely operate with a great deal of independence far from assistance or supervisory oversight. The citizens of South Dakota respect the organization, and the agency receives high marks from the public based on its most recent survey,⁷ but there is also recognition that the world is changing and SDHP must adapt. To its credit, the SDHP recognizes the importance of continuous improvement, and this report highlights some best practices that it has established, and those it intends to implement, for the welfare of its organization and the safety of the communities it serves. ▀

POLICY AND PLANNING: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE SDHP STRATEGIC PLAN

Law enforcement agencies working to make improvements are faced with the same obstacles to change that other organizations in both the public and private sector must confront. Organizations may find themselves re-engineering culture, mission, goals, process, personnel, and even their core professional values as they adjust to changing conditions. Early in his tenure, Colonel Price recognized the need to focus the agency's leadership and strategies on implementing and sustaining positive change. A basic question, common to police management thinking, was the starting point. Within the context of the SDHP's responsibilities, the Colonel sought to find the data and input necessary to answer the following: What is best for the citizens of South Dakota? What is best for the SDHP and its personnel? What unique challenges do we face as an organization, such as, internal and external communication, basic and advanced training, equipment, resources, and staffing? We are doing many things well now, but how can we build on those things? What process should we use to answer questions like these, identify priorities, and track progress for the agency? These are examples of the many things that any new executive needs to think about in addition to managing the day-to-day operations of the organization.

By 2012, the SDHP initiated a partnership with the University of South Dakota's Government Research Bureau to help provide the organization with direction and evidence-based strategies to build a unified sense of purpose and ownership throughout the SDHP. The research included an internal employee engagement survey, a stakeholder survey, and input from both sworn and non-sworn, line-level employees and upper management. The data collected through these methodologies were incorporated into the 2012 three-year Strategic Plan.⁸ The SDHP completed over 80 percent of its goals and tasks listed in the 2012–2015 strategic plan. Because of this success, it was an easy decision to develop and implement another strategic plan in 2016. This time, however, the SDHP conducted a community survey and added that feedback to its plan development.

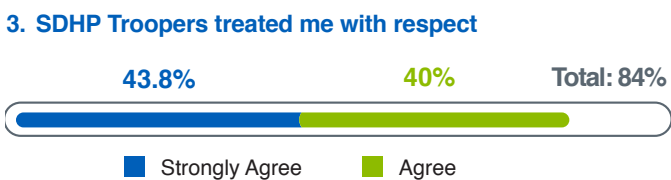
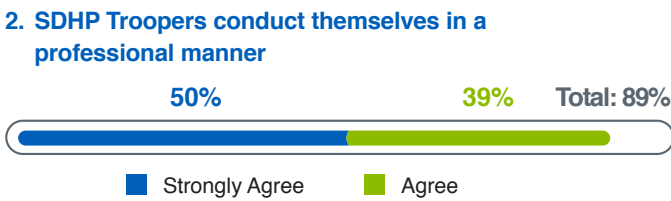
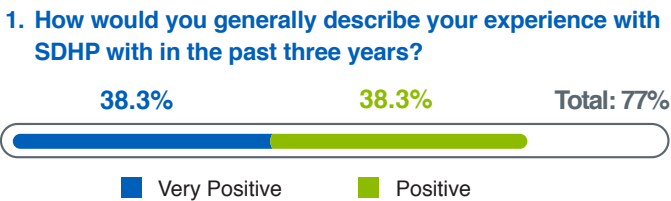
7 Government Research Bureau at the University of South Dakota, July 2015.
 8 CNA Site Team, interviews with South Dakota Highway Patrol staff, September 6–8, 2016.

Designing and implementing the 2016–2019 Strategic Plan required coordination between senior SDHP staff and Dr. Shane Nordyke from the University of South Dakota. Data collection was complex, and input was solicited from employees, community members, and agency stakeholders.⁹ The SDHP’s long-standing relationship with the university was invaluable in harnessing academic expertise to develop, administer, and analyze both the community and employee surveys. These data indicate a significant level of public satisfaction with service provided by the SDHP and shifts in employee opinion that denote a positive workplace environment.

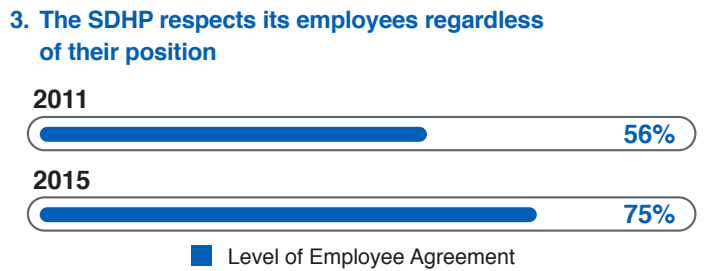
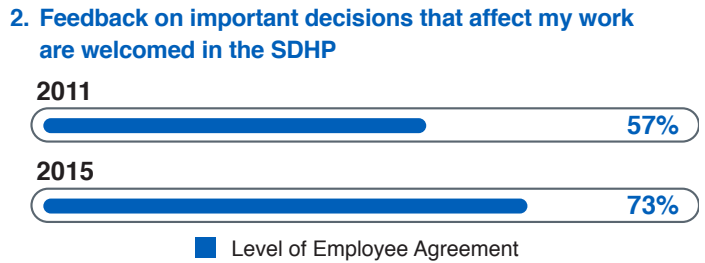
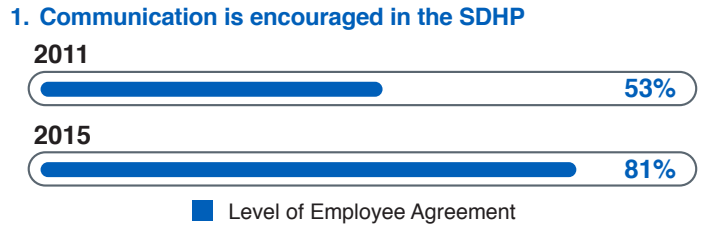
Community survey results indicate that most South Dakota citizens are satisfied with the SDHP. More than three-quarters of respondents rate their experiences with the SDHP in the past three years as “very positive” or “positive.” Similarly, more than 80 percent of those responding agreed that SDHP troopers “conduct themselves in a professional manner” and “treated me with respect.”

The 2015 employee survey demonstrated that significant improvements were achieved in the organization since the original survey in 2011. In 2015, 81 percent of responding employees agreed that communication inside the SDHP was encouraged compared to 53 percent in 2011. When asked in 2011, whether employee feedback on decisions that “affect my work” was welcomed by the agency, 57 percent of those responding agreed whereas 73 percent agreed in 2015. In 2011, 56 percent of employees who responded agreed that the SDHP respects employees regardless of their position. That number rose to 75 percent in 2015.¹⁰

SDHP COMMUNITY SURVEY 2015 – PERCENTAGE OF CITIZENS WHO ANSWERED EACH QUESTION — TOTALS ROUNDED TO THE NEAREST PERCENTAGE POINT



EXAMPLE RESULTS: SDHP EMPLOYEE SURVEYS 2011 & 2015



Like with any public-sector planning process, accountability is vital. Colonel Price has assigned each of the goals and objectives in the Strategic Plan to key personnel within the agency, and meetings to track progress are routine. Decisions regarding adjustments to the plan, consideration of new information, and reprioritization may be undertaken at these routine evaluations. The Strategic Plan is widely distributed among agency personnel, providing a framework for making a good organization even better. Senior staff uses the SDHP Strategic Plan as a working document and frequently refer to it when making administrative decisions—whether they involve policy, procedure, or budget.

Essentially, the SDHP is using the Strategic Plan as a change management tool. This approach can be especially useful for agencies that strive for improvement across a broad spectrum of line, staff, and information management components. Strategic plans are certainly not unique in American policing, but effective and sustainable implementation can be challenging for many agencies in the face of continuous operational and administrative pressures.

The Highway Patrol operates under six strategic priorities. These priorities are embedded in the culture of the highway patrol, and the highway patrol aligns its operational and administrative decisions with these strategic priorities:

1. Leadership
2. DUI/Criminal Interdiction
3. Crash Prevention and Investigation
4. Motor Carrier Services
5. Community Engagement
6. Employee and Organizational Commitment.¹¹

⁹ CNA Site Team, interview with Dr. Shane Nordyke, September 7, 2016. ¹⁰ Survey Data provided by SDHP Fall 2016.

¹¹ South Dakota Highway Patrol, 2016–2019 Strategic Plan.

Within these six strategic priorities, the 2016–2019 Strategic Plan focuses on seven major goals, with an SDHP executive assigned to each:

- **Goal 1:** Continue to encourage employees to maintain high standards of service
- **Goal 2:** Prevent criminal activity and deter DUI behaviors
- **Goal 3:** Reduce the number and severity of crashes
- **Goal 4:** Improve community relations
- **Goal 5:** Develop and maintain positive employee relations
- **Goal 6:** Enhance recruiting practices to increase and diversify manpower
- **Goal 7:** Remain innovative and responsible in our technology use.

Each goal is further divided into objectives and tasks. A total of 97 tasks were derived from the priorities and goals, each with SDHP personnel assigned responsibility for completion.

Examples of SDHP Strategic Plan Goals and Outcomes

The current SDHP Strategic Plan is a comprehensive document with many goals, objectives, and tasks. Below is a sample of some of the success already achieved by the SDHP:

Goal 1 Continue to encourage employees to maintain high standards of service.

Objective: Ensure availability, quality, and relevance of basic and advanced training.

Task: Appoint a member of the community to be on the SDHP Training Committee by December 2016.

Result: A qualified community member was appointed to the committee and continues to serve in that capacity, helping the SDHP shape its training goals and objectives.

Goal 2 Prevent criminal activity and deter DUI behaviors.

Objective: Consistently decrease the percentage of total crashes that are alcohol related and maintain a negative trend in our 5-year average.

Task: Each squad will utilize a saturation patrol aligned with peak travel and crash times at least once every 28 days.

Task: All state troopers must be trained in Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement (ARIDE) within 3 years of employment.

Task: Each squad should develop an annual enforcement plan for the high crash areas. Each enforcement plan should be a minimum of 3 months in duration.

Results: Preliminary 2017 crash statistics show an approximate 35-percent decrease in alcohol-related fatalities in 2017 when compared to the previous 5-year average.

Goal 4 Improve community relations.

Objective: Develop an organized Community-Based Policing Strategy and make it a core principle of the SDHP by 2016.

Task: Require one squad community outreach program per year.

Results: Many community outreach projects have been completed throughout the state of SD by SDHP troopers and Inspectors in 2016 and 2017. Many of these projects have gained the interest of local media, and the SDHP has received countless positive comments from South Dakota citizens in support of these projects.

Goal 5 Develop and maintain positive employee relations.

Objective: Improve officer/employee wellness throughout the agency.

Task: Research and implement an agency wellness program that includes peer support, family support, stress resiliency, emotional and physical well-being, and the Colonel's Fitness challenge by 2018.

Results: The SDHP is currently implementing a robust officer and employee wellness program that will be completed by December 2018. This is being done in partnership with the San Antonio Police Department and the Precision Policing Initiative Team.

These examples show tangible results and emphasize the benefits of combining strong leadership and a practical planning strategy. Creating an environment that supports positive, sustainable change, when embedded in agency culture, adds long-term value and sets the stage for sustained success. When merged with the opportunities afforded by the Precision Policing Initiative, paradigms expand, and change that benefits the community and the organization is embraced and eventually expected. ▀

SNPPI TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (TTA)

The SDHP senior staff collaborated with the SNPPI Team to identify TTA opportunities that would further assist them in advancing the agency's goals. As a result of these discussions, the SDHP identified the following priorities: (1) take steps to become more transparent to the public, (2) institute an Organizational Wellness Plan, and (3) formally implement Community-Based Policing. Taken individually, each of these initiatives represents a significant commitment for any agency; taken together, the scope and potential impacts indicate that the SDHP leadership has confidence that an environment supportive of continuous improvement has been established. ▀

CO-PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The term "transparency" is often referenced in today's policing as being a best practice. Being open to public inquiry, forthrightly explaining police departmental policies, actions, priorities and even

problems help to better engage the community in the co-production of public safety. SDHP recognizes that maintaining and improving the public trust, especially in today's world, calls for reconsideration of some past practices. Colonel Price identified the need to consider placing the agency's policy on the internet. Although increasingly more common among metropolitan police departments over the past decade, state police agencies have tended to keep policy documents more "close hold."

In order to facilitate this process, the SNPPI team arranged for a call between Colonel Price and the Chief Will Johnson of the Arlington Texas Police Department (APD). Chief Johnson described to the Colonel the benefits experienced from openly sharing policy information with the public. After much internal discussion and consideration, the decision was made to post several key agency policies to the SDHP's website in 2018. This is a groundbreaking measure for the SDHP and an important step in maintaining and building on public trust and bolstering the community's engagement in public safety into the future. ▀

PROTECT OFFICER SAFETY AND WELLNESS—SDHP'S ORGANIZATIONAL WELLNESS PLAN

Officers who work in rural settings, as many state troopers do, are especially vulnerable. "If you're a state trooper in a marked police unit, your office is in your car," Price says. "When you're in your car working, it's solitary most of the time. You don't have anyone to talk to, so when something happens you're usually forced to deal with the aftermath of it by yourself... There's got to be a better way to help folks deal with the things they experience on the job, and that's what we're hoping to find out by developing an officer wellness program."

The SDHP places a high value on the quality of service that its members provide to the public. The agency recognizes the strain, and the satisfaction, that comes from doing the job well and is determined to provide the support and resources to enable employees and their families to cope effectively with the personal consequences of law enforcement service. At the Superintendent's request, the SNPPI Team made arrangements to connect SDHP Major Rick Miller with both the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD) and the Washington State Patrol, which included a two-day briefing on the specifics of the SAPD's Performance and Recovery Optimization (PRO) program. Based on these peer exchanges and discussions with senior SDHP senior staff, the SDHP will be implementing a comprehensive wellness program that will significantly enhance the resources available to SDHP employees. ▀

“ The SDHP is developing a robust program that looks at everything from physical fitness and mental health to getting the right peer support, said Colonel Price. Mental health and peer support are especially important. Troopers need that kind of support throughout their career because they confront a lot of bad stuff. For example, we go to a fatal car crash once every three days. That's a lot to deal with over the course of your career.

LIKELY COMPONENTS OF THE SDHP ORGANIZATIONAL WELLNESS PLAN

1. Performance and Recovery Optimization (PRO)
 - a. Academy Training for new recruits
 - b. In-Service Training
2. Formal Peer Support
 - a. Officer – Involved Shooting Support Team
 - b. Family Assistance Team
3. Mental Health Providers on staff
4. Integrated Chaplain Program
5. Retirement Preparation
6. Financial Assistance
7. Employee Assistance Education

These topics were identified as potential components for the program during a series of employee-based and executive-led meetings. The overview plan provides the structure and process for program design and implementation. Initial steps have already been undertaken.

The ultimate goal is to provide a comprehensive, integrated system for employee support and resilience phased in over the next 12 months. ▀

SDHP COMMUNITY POLICING STRATEGY

Discussions among the senior staff led to the decision that, to further advance goals included in the Strategic Plan, the organization should formally adopt a Community-Based Policing

(CBP) Strategy. Working closely with Colonel Price, the Precision Policing team developed the SDHP CBP Strategy. This strategy created a practical, flexible framework for the agency to begin the process of making CBP part of its philosophy and core functions.

The strategy framework identifies the importance of including CBP in the existing planning process. It recognizes the critical role leadership plays in the ultimate success of this effort and highlights the agency and personal commitments necessary to build and sustain external relationships that apply innovation and creativity to address problems. The strategy also acknowledges the role that operational tasks play in delivering high-quality service to citizens and visitors to South Dakota. Improvements in crash prevention and investigation, DUI and criminal interdiction, and traffic safety analysis and operations planning are outlined.

Finally, the framework emphasizes the importance of community education, messaging (social media), and relationship building as critical to ongoing CBP success. Colonel Price introduced the strategy in early 2018 to his entire staff. “Developing a Community-Based Policing Strategy is a goal in our strategic plan. We recognize the value of enhancing already strong relationships with the citizens of South Dakota,” he said. “State Troopers and Motor Carrier Inspectors have always been exceptional at promoting the Highway Patrol and doing “good deeds,” but we wanted to create a more formal strategy for statewide consistency and long-term sustainability.”

The acceptance of the strategy enables the SDHP to improve ties with the communities it serves while, at the same time, positioning it to leverage those relationships for success. Both academic research and practical experience strongly support the proposition that public satisfaction, police legitimacy, and public safety will be enhanced while fear will be reduced when the CBP philosophy is adopted.¹² Identifying the SDHP’s “community” and implementing traditional CBP strategies is generally more challenging for a statewide agency than for municipal or county departments. “State Police cover such vast geographic areas that their reliance on automobiles (or, in Alaska, airplanes, boats, and snowmobiles) is nearly inevitable. Foot patrol and bicycle patrol, visible hallmarks of local-level community policing, are simply not practical for most state policing.”¹³

One example of the CBP philosophy already at work at the SDHP can be seen in the small community of Sisseton in northeast South Dakota. Each of the 16 field squads of SDHP troopers has been challenged to design and implement a formal community project in its squad area. One squad in particular—the Glacial Lakes Squad in the Aberdeen District—rose to the occasion in 2016.¹⁴

The idea began with Trooper Ben Pallesen, who encountered an unused and neglected park one evening while responding to a burglary in progress in Sisseton, South Dakota. “There was a small area next to some tribal housing where there was a basketball court and a play area, but in between the park and

12 Ibid.

13 State Police and Community Policing, USDOJ, Gary Corder, Page 9. 2014.

14 Conversations with Col. Price, Sgt. Johnson, and Trooper Pallesen during site visit March 13, 2017



where folks lived was an area that was full of trash and dead trees. People were afraid to send their kids to play on the playground because this area near it was so downtrodden,” Price recalls. “So [Pallesen] went to the tribal authorities, the city maintenance folks, the sheriff’s office, and the police department and said, ‘Hey. Maybe one day in a month or two we can all meet up, get some equipment, and clean up that area so people will feel comfortable letting their kids play there.’”

The Sisseton Wahpeton Housing Authority, the Sisseton Wahpeton Tribal Police, the Roberts County Sheriff’s Office, the South Dakota Motor Carrier Port of Entry, the City of Sisseton Streets Department, and the Stillson family—a well-known local family that owns the land around the park—all agreed to help out.

Dozens of volunteers showed up to assist in the cleanup, removing dead timber and trash, and installing new lighting and basketball nets. Reaction from the local community was encouraging and gratifying. Best of all, the local children had a new, safe place to play.¹⁵

The immediate, tangible benefits such projects create for communities yield long-term, intangible benefits for law enforcement, according to Price, who says non-enforcement activities like community service build trust and legitimacy on which law enforcement agencies can trade in times of crisis.

“You can solve problems a lot safer and a lot faster if you have relationships in place before a crisis hits,” Price says. “For that reason, we need to get to know people from other agencies and make connections with the people we serve...outside of the traditional policing environment.”

15 Ibid.



CONCLUSION

Policing in America has never been more complicated, more scrutinized, or more important, and leading change in response to this reality is rarely a simple proposition. The South Dakota Highway Patrol has found the formula for creating the capacity to thrive in an increasingly difficult world by harnessing its unique characteristics in new ways. Although some disruption is inevitable, SDHP leadership understands that long-term success is worth the effort for the agency, and for the citizens of South Dakota.

The SDHP leadership effectively leverages its deep understanding of agency culture to not just recognize gaps but to fully pursue opportunities to close those gaps by applying data and new ideas. The South Dakota Highway Patrol's core values and strong traditions combine with vision and commitment to form a durable foundation for its future success and serve as a case study in exemplary precision policing practices. ▀

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